

## A Comparison of News Discourse of Thai Newspaper and English-language Newspaper Published in Thailand

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### Abstract

This study aims to compare the news discourse of a Thai newspaper and an English-language newspaper. The data for the analysis were collected from two 'quality' newspapers, *Matichon*, and *The Bangkok Post*. The language samples were drawn from the same news stories reported on the front page of each newspaper covering a one-month period from July 15<sup>th</sup> to August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013. A content analysis was conducted to compare quantitatively the number of news stories, types of news reported, number of news items<sup>1</sup> per headline, and number of photographs presented on the front page. The linguistic features examined were sentence structures, word choices, and direct quotes. The findings indicate that the major differences between the two newspapers were the number of news stories, photographs, and news items reported on the front page. Regarding the sentence structures and the word choices, *The Bangkok Post*, unlike *Matichon*, used mostly complete simple sentences in headlines. For word choices, *Matichon* was found to use many colloquial terms and slang in headlines, and the metaphorical concepts of slang were related mainly to rivalry, conflicts, violence, or condemnation which portrayed the political situations at the time of data collection. However, the language uses of both newspapers were relatively similar in the body of the news story - - the body was generally lengthy and contained direct quotes. In general, *The Bangkok Post* was found to write shorter sentences and use more concise language.

**Keywords:** News discourse, headlines, word choices, metaphor, direct quotes.

### บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้เปรียบเทียบความแตกต่างด้านลักษณะภาษาที่ใช้ในการเขียนข่าวในหนังสือพิมพ์ไทยและหนังสือพิมพ์ฉบับภาษาอังกฤษที่ดีพิมพ์ในประเทศไทย โดยเลือกหนังสือพิมพ์ดิชนรายวันและหนังสือพิมพ์บางกอกโพสต์เป็นตัวอย่างในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล ผู้วิจัยเลือกวิเคราะห์เฉพาะข่าวที่หนังสือพิมพ์ทั้งสองฉบับลงตรงกันเป็นข่าวหน้าหนึ่งในช่วง 1 เดือน ระหว่างวันที่ 15 กรกฎาคม – 15 สิงหาคม 2556 ผู้วิจัยใช้วิเคราะห์เนื้อหาเพื่อเปรียบเทียบประเภทข่าวที่ดีพิมพ์ จำนวนข่าว และจำนวนภาพประกอบในหน้าหนึ่ง ตลอดทั้งจำนวนประเด็นย่อยของแต่ละข่าวในพาดหัวข่าว ส่วนลักษณะภาษาที่วิเคราะห์ได้แก่ ลักษณะประโยค การเลือกใช้คำ และการอ้างตรง ในส่วนของการเลือกใช้คำ ลักษณะภาษาที่ศึกษา ได้แก่ การใช้สlang และสำนวน การใช้ชื่อเล่น ฉายา นาม อักษรย่อ คำทับศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษ และการใช้ภาษาเชิงเปรียบ ผลการศึกษาพบว่าหนังสือพิมพ์ดิชนใช้ลีและ

ประโยชน์ไม่สมบูรณ์ในพادหัวข่าว ขณะที่หนังสือพิมพ์บางกอกโพสต์ใช้ประโยชน์ความเดียวและเป็นประโยชน์สมบูรณ์ ผลการวิเคราะห์การเลือกใช้คำพบว่า หนังสือพิมพ์มีชนใช้ถ้อยคำที่แสดงภาษาพูดรวมทั้งสlang จำนวนมากใน พادหัวข่าว และคำที่แสดงความหมายเชิงเปรียบหรืออุปลักษณ์ส่วนใหญ่เป็นคำที่มีความหมายเกี่ยวกับความเป็น ศักดิ์สิทธิ์ ความน่าดึงดูด หรือการประณาม ซึ่งสะท้อนสถานการณ์ทางการเมืองในขณะนั้น อย่างไรก็ตาม ลักษณะการ เขียนน่าสนใจของหนังสือพิมพ์ทั้งสองฉบับมีความคล้ายคลึงกัน คือประกอบด้วยหลักการอ่านง่าย น่าสนใจ และมีการอ้าง ตัวอย่างที่นำไป กล่าวได้ว่าหนังสือพิมพ์บางกอกโพสต์ใช้ประโยชน์ที่สั้นกว่าและใช้ภาษาที่กระชับมากกว่า

**คำสำคัญ:** ภาษาสื่อ พادหัวข่าว การเลือกใช้คำ ภาษาเชิงเปรียบ การอ้างตัว

## 1. Introduction

The way language is used in the media which constitutes 'media language' is interesting to us as language users and to media researchers. We might be able to say that our everyday language and communication are influenced by media language such as idioms, sentence structures, and style of language use. In light of the press media, especially newspapers, news discourse has gained interest among researchers as it is not 'a natural' form of writing. It is a particular discourse with its own rhythms, tones, words and phrases (Keeble, 2006). Besides linguistic signs, other visual signs are used in newspapers to connote what is reported in the news. By reporting some events and excluding others, newspapers and other news media use particular news discourse to ideologically represent the world (Fairclough, 1995, p. 5; Bignell, 1997, p. 82).

Major national newspapers in most countries are usually divided into 'quality' and 'popular' newspapers based on their readership. Here is a list of Britain's major daily newspapers which are grouped according to these categories. *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, and *The Guardian* are classified as 'quality' whereas *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror*, and *The Daily Mail* are termed as 'popular'. In the United States, most major newspapers are the so-called 'quality' as they are prestigious newspapers although some are based in regional areas. Examples are *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times* (Bignell, 1997, pp. 82 – 83). In Thailand, a categorization of newspapers into 'quality' and 'popular' can similarly be done for Thai daily newspapers. The only two major English-language newspapers, *The Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* published locally in Bangkok, can both be classified as the 'quality' ones according to their readership.

In this study which aimed to compare the news discourse of a Thai newspaper and an English-language newspaper published locally, *Matichon* (M) and *The Bangkok Post* (BP) were chosen for comparison. Both can equally be classified as 'quality' newspapers based on their readership and circulation. The research question of this study is 'In what aspects of news discourse do a Thai daily newspaper and an English-language newspaper differ?'

## 2. Method

### 2.1. The data

The language data collected for the analysis of news discourse came from two 'quality' daily newspapers. One was '*Matichon*', a Thai newspaper, and '*The Bangkok Post*', the oldest English-language newspaper published in Thailand. The language samples were drawn from the same news stories that appeared on the front page of each newspaper covering a one-month period from July 15<sup>th</sup> to August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

### 2.2. Data analysis

A content analysis was conducted to compare quantitatively the number of news stories, types of news reported, number of news items, and number of photographs presented on the front page of each newspaper. In analyzing news discourse, the linguistic features examined were sentence structures, word choices, and direct quotes. For word choices, uses of slang, idiomatic expressions, metaphors, nicknames, coined nicknames, English - Thai transliteration, and abbreviations were investigated.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Presentation of news on front page

As can be seen in Table 1, *Matichon* outnumbered *The Bangkok Post* in all aspects listed in the table, namely the number of news stories and photographs that appeared on the front page, and the number of items or elements in each news event reported in the headlines. Based on the number of news items, it is clear that *Matichon* gave more details in reporting the news compared to *The Bangkok Post*.

Newspaper items	*No. of news stories on front page	*No. of photos on front page	No. of news per headline
Matichon	8.70	4.20	2.5
Bangkok Post	1.90	2.30	1.07

\* average number per issue

Table 1 Presentation of news on front page

### 3.2. Types of news

Table 2 below indicates that Matichon reported much more news on its front page and with more news types. News about the scandals and misdeeds, especially of well-known persons came first in Matichon, i.e. 23 news items (26.43%) whereas The Bangkok Post reported only 2 news items (10.52%) of this type. News concerning riots and protests were reported most in The Bangkok Post during that period of time. However, of the 14 different categories of news, The Bangkok Post had almost the same number as Matichon, having 10 categories of news. This possibly indicates that, in general, both newspapers reported similar types of news according to their readers' interests, and followed the main criteria for newsworthiness in terms of NEGATIVITY/CONFLICT, RECENCY, PROXIMITY /RELEVANCE, and ELITENESS (Bell, 1991, p. 157; Itule and Anderson, 2003, p. 14). As can be predicted, international news were reported more in The Bangkok Post.

Type of news	Matichon		Bangkok Post	
	N	%	N	%
1. Scandals, misdeeds	23	26.43	2	10.52
2. Elite persons	11	12.64	2	10.52
3. Political leaders' activities	7	7	-	-
4. Political issues	7	8.04	3	15.78
5. Riots/protests	7	8.04	5	26.31
6. Government policies/ projects	6	6.89	-	-
7. Sports	5	5.74	1	5.63
8. Environment	5	5.74	1	5.63
9. Parliamentary debates/bill-passing	4	4.59	1	5.63

Type of news	Matichon		Bangkok Post	
	N	%	N	%
10. Royal activities	3	3.44	-	-
11. Religious affairs	3	3.44	-	-
12. War, conflict (in the Deep South)	3	3.44	2	10.52
13. Accidents, disasters	2	2.29	1	5.63
14. International news	1	1.14	3	15.78
Total	87	100.00	19	100.00

Table 2 Number of news stories according to type reported on the front page

### 3.3. News language

#### 3.3.1. Language use in news headlines and news leads

Generally, both Matichon and The Bangkok Post reported hard news on the front page. They similarly wrote news stories in inverted-pyramid style in which the news is reported in paragraphs arranged in order of descending importance, with six primary elements of a news event in the lead paragraph. The six elements are: *Who* the event happened to or *who* acted on whom, *What* happened or will happen, *Where* the action occurred, *When* it happened, *Why* the action took place, and *How* it happened. (Itule and Anderson, 2003, p. 45)

##### 1) Language in headlines

Generally, a headline is written to quickly and briefly draw the reader's attention into the news story. It highlights the main theme or angle of the story, so it should use concise language.

From the analysis of headlines, it reveals that all news reported on the front page of Matichon had both headlines and sub-headlines, whereas in The Bangkok Post, sub-headlines were provided only for the most prominent, which was usually the longest and most-detailed news of the front page.

The main differences between the two newspapers in language use in headlines and sub-headlines were as follows:

### 1.1) Sentence structures

Matichon was found to mostly use incomplete sentences in the form of reduced clauses, phrases, or omitted-subject sentences. By contrast, most headlines and sub-headlines in The Bangkok Post were written in complete sentences usually with the omission of the articles (*a, an, or the*). In addition, Matichon's headlines contained more phrases and incomplete sentences which represented more items or elements within a news event, whereas in The Bangkok Post, a headline was mostly written in one single simple sentence.

### *Matichon examples:*

(1) มือบแข็งคีก-คีนชีพ  
ยืน 'ปู' 6 ข้อ  
นีดเส้น 7 วัน-ชุมนุม 4 ส.ค.

<i>móp</i>	<i>c<sup>h</sup>ɛɛ-k<sup>h</sup>ɛɛŋ</i>	<i>k<sup>h</sup>úk</i>	<i>// k<sup>h</sup>uun-c<sup>h</sup>iip</i>
mob	freeze	vigorous	// back - life
<i>yúun</i>	<i>puu</i>	<i>hòk</i>	<i>k<sup>h</sup>òo</i>
hand to	'Puu'	six	item
<i>k<sup>h</sup>iit - sén</i>	<i>cèt</i>	<i>wan</i>	<i>// c<sup>h</sup>um-num sìi</i>
draw - line	seven	day	// get together four
<i>söö-k<sup>h</sup>oo</i>			
August			

'The 'Freeze Thailand' mob (the anti-government group) become vigorous. [They] came back.'

'[They] challenge 'Puu' (Prime Minister Yingluck's nickname) with six-point demands.'

'[They] set a 7-day deadline' //

'[They] will rally on August 4<sup>th</sup>,

[M: 21-07-2013]

(2) a. พาดหัวข่าว (headlines)

แชมป์โลกของขวัญวันแม่  
เมียโค่นจีน

b. พาดหัวรอง (sub-headlines)

อายุน้อยสุด – คนแรกไทย  
ทุบสถิติเบตต์ – รับแล้ว 1.5 ล้าน  
ปีติ 'ดอกไม้พระราชทาน'

a. Headlines

*cʰéεm* - *lóok*      *kʰɔɔŋkʰwǎn*      *wan* - *mɛε*  
champion - world      gift      day - mother

*mee*      *kʰōon*      *ciin*  
May      defeat      China/Chinese  
(Ratchanok)

'[The] world championship title [is a] gift [for] Mother's Day'

'May (Ratchanok) defeated the Chinese [contestant].'

b. Sub-headlines

*qaa-yú‡*      *nóoy*      *sùt//*      *kʰon*      *rɛεk*      *tʰay*  
age      little      most//      person      first      Thai

*tʰúp*      *sà-tʰí-tí‡*      *bèt*      //      *ráp*  
beat      statistics      badminton      //      receive

*lɛεw*      1.5      *láan*  
already      1.5      million

*piiti‡*      *dòok* - *máay*      *pʰráráatcʰatʰaan*  
glad      flower      royal bestow

'The youngest' // 'the first Thai [champion]'

'Beating the badminton [championship] records // got 1.5 million baht'

'Overjoyed with 'Royal flowers'

[M: 12-0-2013]

*The Bangkok Post examples:*

(3) 'White masks return in muted numbers'

[BP: 15-07-2013]

(4) 'Ratchanok takes badminton world championship'

[BP: 12-08-2013]

As can be seen in examples (1), (2), (3) and (4), the headlines and sub-headlines in Matichon were mostly written in phrases and incomplete sentences. By contrast, The Bangkok Post's headlines used complete sentences. When considering the number of issues in each headline, it is evident that there were more details in each of the Matichon's headlines. Regarding the space provided for each news on the front page, Matichon looked more crowded in that it reported more news and wrote longer headlines.

### 1.2) *Choice of words in headlines and leads*

The analysis of word choices in the headlines of both newspapers indicates that Matichon used colloquial terms which included slang, idiomatic expressions, and nicknames and coined nicknames. In contrast, there hardly were colloquialisms in The Bangkok Post's headlines. Only some abbreviations and the shortened forms of certain names or words were used.

Here are some examples from each newspaper.

*Matichon examples:*

#### a. *Slang and idiomatic expressions*

คึก	k <sup>h</sup> ííwk	'vigorous'
โคล่น	k <sup>h</sup> ôon	'to defeat' (literally 'to cut down' or 'to fell a tree')
อัด	øát	'to condemn', 'to criticize'
ถล่ม	t <sup>h</sup> a - lòm	'to bombard'
วุ่น	wûn	'chaotic'
จัดหนัก	càt - nàk	'to furiously debate against'
บี้	bîi	'to crash'

ดื้อ	t̚̚p̚̚	'to persist'
ลือกเป้า	lók - pâu	'to target someone to debate against'
ท่อน้ำเลี้ยงไม่แข็งแรง	t̚̚b̚̚ - náam - liaŋ mây k̚̚éŋr̚̚eŋ	'weak financial support' (literally 'unstable water feeding pipe')

*b. Nicknames and coined nicknames*

*Nicknames:*

‘ยู’	puu	'Prime Minister Yingluck's nickname'
‘ตี้ง’	t̚̚oŋ	'Mr. Kittiratt Na-Ranong's (Finance Minister) nickname'
‘อ้อย’	ʔɔ̚̚y	'Mr. Chaturon Chaisang's (Education Minister) nickname'

*Coined nicknames:*

สมีคำ	sa - mǐi - k̚̚am	'the defrocked monk named Kham'
ขุนค้อน	k̚̚unk̚̚r̚̚on	"The Hammer Man", referring to Mr. Somsak Kiatsuranont, the House Speaker who intensively used a gavel in parliamentary meetings'
ม็อบแข็ง	m̚̚p̚̚ c̚̚é̚̚ - k̚̚é̚̚eŋ	'The Freeze Thailand' mob (the anti-government protesters)'

*c. Abbreviations*

ส.ส.	ຮວວ - ຮວວ	'MP: member of Parliament'
สมช.	ຮວວ - ໝວວ - c̚̚cc	'National Security Council'
พท.	p̚̚cc - t̚̚cc	'Pheu Thai Party'
ปชป.	ccd - c̚̚cc - ccd	'Prachathipat- -The Democrat Party'

*d. English loan words (English - Thai transliteration)*

ม็อบ	mōp	'mob'
เช็คดีอีนเอ	c <sup>h</sup> ék dii - ʔen - ʔee	'DNA test'
วอล์คเอาต์	pów <sup>h</sup> k - ʔáu	'walk out of a meeting'
ฟีเวอร์	fii - wêə	'fever as in 'May' (Ratchanok) Fever'
ฮิวแมนไรท์วอทช์	hiw - mēən ráy wót	'Human Rights Watch'

*1.3) Metaphorical concepts of slang and idioms in headlines*

As slang and idiomatic expressions are largely metaphorical in nature, it is important to look at their conceptual meanings. Results from the present study indicates that most of the slang and idioms used in Matichon's headlines (58.82% of them) were found to reflect the metaphorical concepts of rivalry, conflicts, violence, or condemnation which portrayed the political turmoil at the time of data collection. This finding corresponds to the study conducted by Srinarawat (2007, p. 104) which reveals that the analyzed political slang reflected mostly the metaphorical concepts of war and the related concepts of fighting, killing, weapons and arguments.

*The Bangkok Post examples*

Unlike Matichon, The Bangkok Post's headlines did not use slang, idioms, nicknames or coined nicknames. Only some abbreviations and the shortened forms of certain words were used, e.g. HK (Hong Kong), uni (university), DSI (Department of Special Investigation), Dems (Democrat Party members), Govt (Government). This signifies that The Bangkok Post used comparatively more formal, straightforward and neutral language. Here are the examples:

- (5) 110 Thaksin allies flock to HK
- (6) 'Fake uni' close as DSI looks on

**3.3.2. Language use in lead paragraphs and body**

Both Matichon and The Bangkok Post were found to begin their news stories with a *summary lead*, an opening paragraph which provides the main idea and meaning of the story and invites the readers to follow the rest. A summary lead is generally a traditional form of writing a news story in inverted-pyramid style. It gives the important points immediately at the start of the story. According to Itule and Anderson (2003, p. 44), the

summary lead should be brief, and generally be written with no more than 35 words. Based on this criterion, The Bangkok Post was found to write a concise lead in comparison to Matichon as seen in the following examples:

(7) Opposition members and anti-government groups vowed yesterday to march through police blockades to Parliament this morning to fight against an amnesty bill due to be deliberated in the Lower House today.

[BP: 07-08-2013]

(8) ปชป.นัด 9 โ明เข้านำมือบเดินเท้าฝ่าด่านตำรวจ เข้าสภាដ้าน กม.นิรโทษวันนี้ ผบ.ตร. กล่าว ให้เข้าได้เฉพาะส.ส. ตร. แล้วข่าวล้อม 'ทำเนียบ-สภा' สิ่งตั้งด่านตำรวจเข้มสน 5 สาย จ่อถอนประกัน 2 แกนนำมือบสวนลุมฯ กลุ่มกองทัพประชาชนคุยวางแผนโค่นรัฐบาลเชื้อ คว้าชัย

The Democrat Party [members] arranged [to meet] at 9 a.m. to lead the [anti-government] mob to march through police blockades to the Parliament [in order to] protest against the amnesty bill today. The National Police Chief has made it clear that only members of parliament would be allowed to enter [the Parliament]. Police were allegedly reported that the Government House and the Parliament would be seized [by the protesters]. [The National Police Chief] ordered strong blockades on 5 streets. [Police] aimed at cancelling bail of 2 mob leaders at Lumpini Park. The people's Force (People's Democratic Force to Overthrow Thaksinism) bragged they had 4 plans to overthrow the government.

[M: 07-08-2013]

The example given in (7) above clearly shows that The Bangkok Post followed the criteria of writing a good summary lead in that it summarized the principal items of a news event. It was also brief and written in a single sentence containing no more than 35 words. By contrast, Matichon's lead in Example (8) was longer and reported more items or topics.

When considering the language written in the body of the story in each newspaper, the analysis reveals that both Matichon and The Bangkok Post generally reported their news in complete complex sentences. The readers were guided to follow the news in a series of paragraphs, and direct quotes from various sources were given to make a strong back-up to the preceding paragraphs. However, Matichon's body paragraphs differed from

those of The Bangkok Post in that Matichon gave a headline to each group of the related paragraphs while The Bangkok Post did not.

The following Table 3 compares both newspapers' uses of slang, nicknames, coined nicknames, abbreviations, transliteration, metaphors and direct quotes.

Language features	Matichon		Bangkok Post	
	N	%	N	%
1. Slang, idioms	17	7.45	-	-
2. Nicknames	18	7.89	-	-
3. Coined nicknames	12	5.26	-	-
4. Abbreviations, shortened forms	102	44.73	22	39.28
5. Transliteration	12	5.26	-	-
6. Metaphor	17	7.45	1	1.78
7. Direct quotes	50	21.92	33	58.92
Total	228	100.00	56	100.00

Table 3 Number of particular language features in body of story

The findings as shown in Table 3 indicate that in the body paragraphs of the news stories, both newspapers used a large number of abbreviations and shortened forms of certain types of words, especially names of groups of people or organizations, e.g. names of political parties, business groups, government agencies or international organizations. Most abbreviations were familiar terms to readers and the use of them helped save space on the pages. It is also interesting to find that Matichon and The Bangkok Post similarly used a large proportion of direct quotes. A direct quote is important in that it reflects a direct conversation with the readers, and may convey the most powerful news points in the story.

#### 4. Conclusion and Discussion

The results from the study indicate that the two 'quality' newspapers, Matichon and The Bangkok Post, were different in many aspects of language use and reporting of news stories. The major differences were: the number of news stories and photographs presented on the front page, number of news items per headline, number of news types, and the sentence types written in headlines. For word choices, Matichon was found to use many

colloquialisms including slang. It is interesting to find that most slang used in Matichon's headlines connoted the metaphorical concepts of rivalry, conflicts, violence, or condemnation which depicted the political situations at the time of data collection. Matichon's reason to use such metaphors which are commonly found in most Thai newspapers may come from the fact that metaphors are a way to simplify issues to make them intelligible and help evoke emotional responses of the readers (Charteris-Black, 2014, p. 207). Nevertheless, both Matichon and The Bangkok Post were relatively similar in writing the body of the news story in that the body was generally lengthy and contained direct quotes.

Although this study did not look at the underlying ideologies of the newspapers, it can fairly be said that the different ways the two newspapers reported the same news stories and the ways they used language reflect their ideological principles. Further studies to compare other aspects of media discourse and the connoted ideologies of Thai newspapers or of English-language newspapers are recommended.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> News items or news points here refer to the most important elements of a news event which answer *who, what, when, where, why* and *how*.

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